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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ABUJA 001244

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BRUSSELS FOR HINSON-JONES  
BANJUL FOR DCM  
CONAKRY FOR SAM HEALY  
PM FOR WEINSTEIN

E.O. 12598: DECLAS 05/14/2011  
TAGS: PREL KPKO MARR MASS NI  
SUBJECT: In Depth Discussion on ECOWAS Capacity Building

(U) Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter; Reasons 1.5  
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: AF/RA LTC Mike Bittrick discussed ECOWAS' capacity-building plans with newly arrived Deputy Executive Secretary Diarra and ECOWAS Military Advisor Dikio on May

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¶14. Diarra outlined his vision and the responsibilities of his newly formed department. He identified areas where ECOWAS would seek assistance, and emphasized primarily a need for expertise. Dikio, as the sole active military officer on the Secretariat staff, discussed his overstretched role as military advisor, the need for a maintenance culture in West Africa and the need for oversight in ECOWAS. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) AF/RA Michael Bittrick and EmbOffs paid a call on ECOWAS Deputy Executive Secretary (DES) for Political Affairs, Defense and Security, General (ret) Cheick Oumar Diarra, and ECOWAS Military Advisor Colonel M. Dixon Dikio. A detailed and wide-ranging discussion of ECOWAS' capacity building plans ensued.

¶3. (C) Diarra began by apologizing for Kouyate's absence, and explained that the Executive Secretary was in Conakry for meetings with President Conte. Diarra noted that at the end of the last Extraordinary Summit in Abuja, Presidents Obasanjo, Konare and Eyadema had been tasked with organizing a mini-summit of the Mano River Union States. The need for political dialogue was clear, and Kouyate was assisting with this effort, Diarra said.

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NEW BOSS, SIMILAR IDEAS, NEW ENERGY  
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¶4. (C) Diarra explained that the ECOWAS Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, agreed upon by ECOWAS Heads of State, included four yet-to-be staffed departments under his office: political affairs, humanitarian affairs, defense and security, and the monitoring and observation center. Pointing to himself and Dikio, he noted that presently "there are a total of two people" in the department. (In fact, as we spoke to him, an ECOWAS hiring committee awaited his arrival to interview candidates for the four sub-offices.) Diarra said that ECOWAS would immediately undertake three steps, as directed by his office, to build ECOWAS capacity to prevent, mediate and resolve crises in the sub-region: Establish a monitoring and observation center, train and evaluate stand-by units (SBUs) and establish a Council of Elders (all three mandated by the mechanism).

¶5. (C) OBSERVATION AND MONITORING CENTER: Diarra explained that the first step was to create the observation and monitoring center. With conflict prevention the logical first priority (peacekeeping and conflict resolution being enormously more difficult and time-consuming), ECOWAS must begin with the first piece of their prevention mechanism, the early warning system. Observation headquarters would be set up in four zones: Banjul (for Senegal, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bisau, The Gambia), Ouagadougou (for Mali, Burkina-Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Niger), Monrovia (for Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ghana) and Cotonou (for Benin, Nigeria, Togo). These would feed information on their duty-states to the "Situation Center" at the ECOWAS Secretariat. (Diarra noted that the four host countries had provided accommodation for the offices, and that an agreement on the status of the personnel had been signed with Burkina-Faso and Benin, with The Gambia to sign the following week.) Duty teams would cull and analyze information, and pass

their analysis and comment to the DES, who would then report to the Executive Secretary. Diarra stated that, "We think most of the problem with conflict prevention is a lack of information," reiterating the need for an early warning system.

16. (C) Individuals were being recruited from the 15 member-states, and the ECOWAS Legal Department (which, he noted, did not formally work for him, although the Department had been performing the functions of his office for quite some time) was assisting with the hiring process. Diarra said that presently there were only five individuals assigned to each office, and this was too few. He and Dikio both stated that the planning for the observation HQs needed to be "fine-tuned," and implied that now that Diarra was on the job, this process had begun.

17. (C) COMPOSITE STAND-BY UNITS: Diarra said the second step would be to oversee the training and staffing of the ECOWAS/ECOMOG SBUs. Each member-state had agreed to provide anywhere from a company to a battalion to create an early response capacity within ECOWAS. ECOWAS planned to train these units to "harmonize procedures," Diarra said. Dikio expressed concern that some member-states might identify units that would then be redirected to internal missions, thereby weakening the SBU structure. Diarra explained that Dikio would be leaving the same week to travel to member-states to review the proposed units, speak to their commanders, discuss training and exercises, determine assistance needed, and ascertain their ability to participate effectively in the force.

18. (C) ECOWAS would also look to create two depots, one in the interior of the sub-region and one on the coast, to store equipment for the SBUs, Diarra said. He explained that when Niger had volunteered troops for the planned Guinea-Liberia border force, it had been able to offer soldiers and rifles only. The equipment stored at these bases would allow ECOWAS to equip such troops in the future, he said. At present, he said, ECOWAS stored (but did not maintain) mostly out-of-service equipment brought back from Liberia at a warehouse in Lagos.

19. (C) COUNCIL OF ELDERS: Diarra then noted that the mechanism included a "Council of Elders," made up of former Heads of State and other notable West African "eminent persons," who would act to mediate conflicts. The Council would be established quickly, he said, since it would require few resources to operate. He expected the first meeting of the Council to take place in Niamey on the 27th or 28th of June (a postponement of the initial May start-up date).

10. (C) ECOWAS MORATORIUM ON SMALL ARMS: Separately, Diarra noted that the ECOWAS Moratorium's formal mandate would expire at the end of October 2001 (a three year renewable mandate). He explained the process by which states must apply to import small arms. Requests are sent to member-states' national committees, which if approved, would forward the requests to ECOWAS. (COMMENT: Small arms requests to ECOWAS have thus far been handled by Colonel Dikio. END COMMENT.) ECOWAS then forwards the application with comment to other member-states. If no one objects, or if there is no response within one month, the importation request is approved. Diarra noted the need to train national security forces on the small arms issue, and to have more discussions with manufacturers. Dikio added that, to his mind, manufacturers had been extremely cooperative thus far, in some cases more so than member-states. Diarra said that ECOWAS was planning a meeting, with PCASED assistance, to assess the Moratorium and develop a recommendation on renewal.

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THE PITCH  
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11. (C) Diarra identified four assistance requirements: expertise and planning capability, equipment, training (both for the SBUs and for staff) and security programs. On this last point he said ECOWAS had identified a need but did not yet have a clear program, so it was not yet asking for help.

12. (C) EXPERTISE AND PLANNING CAPABILITY: Diarra explained that ECOWAS had a vision, but needed expertise. For example, he said, the Mechanism set forth a Secretariat "situation center," but neither he nor Colonel Dikio knew

exactly what it should "look like." He also noted that his department would need a planning and management cell for operations. He explained that he desired expertise to design his military advisory structure, and would prefer not to have to call on the UN or member-states' military staff each time an operation was required. Dikio agreed with the need for a planning cell, noting that he alone had planned the Guinea-Liberia border force (including the planning, travel to the border, and travel to view the forces offered by member-states). He said that he had eventually recommended support by UN and member-state personnel for the border force planning process, because it was "too much" for one person to handle. He added that he had not been involved in the ECOWAS training exercise in Togo because of his other responsibilities.

¶13. (C) EQUIPMENT: Diarra said the primary need was for expertise, but ECOWAS would also welcome provision of needed equipment. He identified, as priorities, communications gear for the observation stations and video conferencing capability for the Secretariat (to connect with the UN and any operating force headquarters). Diarra said that the EU had provided ECOWAS a one-time grant of about 2 million Euros for the observation and monitoring center. ECOWAS had spent Euro 1 million already, and would spend the rest between April and December of 2001. After December, he noted, member-states would become fiscally responsible for the mechanism. Denmark and Norway had indicated that they might provide some additional funding, but it was unclear at this point what they would offer. He noted that ECOWAS had contracted a firm to develop and supply software for the situation center and to provide an electronic screen. In any case, he noted, more would be needed, and would be welcome.

¶14. (C) TRAINING: Diarra said that ECOWAS would need assistance for training exercises for the SBUs and for the staff of his department.

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THE COLONEL'S IDEAS  
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¶15. (C) After Diarra departed to interview staff, the conversation continued with Colonel Dikio for another 45 minutes. Dikio expanded on Diarra's remarks and made a number of other notable points. He argued that the method of fighting insurgencies with traditionally organized forces and long logistical lines needed to be rethought. Using Operation Focus Relief as an example of "excellent" training, he emphasized that it had been designed to meet a certain need, and stated that similar training would be valuable to future ECOWAS forces.

¶16. (C) On assistance to ECOWAS, Dikio said that it would be best if the U.S., France and the UK (and other partners) jointly assist ECOWAS to avoid duplication. He noted that this applied to expertise, direct assistance and training. Dikio used Blue Pelican as an example where France and the UK had worked together, but regretted that while the event was useful, it was "one time only." He also was receptive to the idea of seconded personnel from the UN or elsewhere, assuming the approval of the Executive Secretary, and to the idea of exchanges between ECOWAS and other organizations.

¶17. (C) Dikio then turned to issues of accountability, and noted that the assistance provided by the EU included a contractor, who provided oversight. Implying that without oversight there could be problems with waste, Dikio noted that oversight was important to ensure that work was completed. He also mentioned that while 60 - 65 percent of the ECOMOG equipment from Liberia was unserviceable, ECOWAS had brought the equipment to Lagos for accountability reasons. Dikio also acknowledged the need for equipment given to ECOWAS to be properly maintained, and said, "There is no point in giving equipment if it will suffer a 60 - 70 casualty rate." He lamented the lack of a maintenance culture in the Nigerian military and in the sub-region, and expressed hope that now that the Nigerian military is no longer involved in "other matters," an emphasis on maintaining equipment would return within a few years.

¶18. (C) Bittrick mentioned the need for long-range planning by ECOWAS for donors to anticipate and provide assistance. Dikio said that now that Diarra had assumed his position, ECOWAS would be able to provide long-range planning. He expected a one-year plan would be available in the next three months.

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COMMENT

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¶19. (C) While the Embassy has reported in the past on the structures ECOWAS has formally created, it is clear that with the arrival of DES Diarra, the real construction process has begun. Perhaps the most positive note is Diarra's realization of the need to build institutional capacity as evidenced by his focus on expertise rather than equipment or money (though these were not forgotten). Coordination with other donor nations seems essential here.

¶20. (C) The Mechanism was preliminarily adopted by Heads of State on December 10, 1999. In the Final Communiqué of the Heads of State Summit in Abuja on April 11, 2001, the participants noted several continuing problems: 1) the staggering amount of arrears "owed by most member-states;" 2) "delay" in implementation of the small arms moratorium (most states have yet to establish their national committees, even as the moratorium is set to expire in four months); 3) delay in the ratification of the mechanism itself (only two have done it). Despite these continuing obstacles, the ECOWAS Secretariat has now embarked upon the actual erection of the Mechanism's security structures. The U.S. and other partners have the opportunity to assist the ECOWAS response capacities and to positively influence exactly how the mechanism functions on the ground. END COMMENT.

¶21. (U) LTC Bittrick cleared this cable.

¶22. (U) Freetown Minimize Considered.  
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